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Mr Daniel Sumner
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Dear Mr Sumner

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Calow CofE VC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 April 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- effectively allocate and monitor the pupil premium funding, ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make the progress of which they are capable.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, assistant headteacher, the previous interim executive headteacher, subject leaders responsible for English and mathematics, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, a member of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I also spoke with parents and carers at the start of the school day, and a group of pupils. I visited all classrooms and evaluated school improvement plans, as well as

assessment information provided by the school, minutes from meetings of the governing body and documents relating to safeguarding.

Context

The previous headteacher left the school at the end of the summer term 2017. The governing body acted swiftly to appoint an interim executive headteacher from a local infant school for the subsequent two terms. The substantive headteacher took up his post in the same week as this monitoring visit. There has been an effective, well-planned handover from the interim executive headteacher to the new substantive headteacher.

Main findings

The interim executive headteacher, leaders and governing body have acted decisively to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. School improvement plans now contain precise success criteria, actions and milestones. As a result, it is clear what is to be done, by when and by whom. Individual governors make frequent visits to the school in order to monitor the progress of the improvement plans. For example, a recent visit by the chair of the governing body, together with the mathematics leader, highlighted the need for teachers to provide more frequent opportunities for pupils to develop problem-solving and reasoning skills. There is now a robust system in place for governors to report their findings from such visits to the remainder of the governing body. Records of governing body meetings show clearly where governors are asking questions of leaders about the progress towards the milestones and priorities in the improvement plan, and about the quality of teaching and learning at the school. Consequently, the governing body is now holding leaders fully to account for the actions they take.

The school has joined a national programme that has enabled subject leaders to drive up standards, for example in reading. The programme has also provided a framework for teachers and leaders to analyse frequently the attainment and progress pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics. Any pupil who is not making sufficient progress is identified quickly and given the support they need to catch up. Leaders are now actively involved in effectively monitoring the quality of pupils' work. For example, there have been a number of opportunities for staff to moderate pupils' work with colleagues from other schools. As a result, the assessment judgements made by teachers are accurate and secure.

Teachers are now using pupils' assessment information effectively to plan and set work at the appropriate level of challenge. For example, a group of pupils in Year 1 were engaged in writing a list of equipment that Ranulph Fiennes might take on an Arctic expedition. Other groups were finding countries on a world map and writing sentences about what it might be like to be an explorer.

Teachers have established high expectations of what pupils can achieve. This is because they are frequently meeting with colleagues from other schools to compare

standards of pupils' work in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders are carefully analysing pupils' assessment information to check that no particular year group or subject is falling behind. Current assessment information provided by the school suggests that the great majority of pupils are on track to achieve the expectations for their age in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of the academic year. Teachers are increasingly using the school's marking and feedback policy effectively. This helps to ensure that pupils know which aspects of their work they have completed well and which aspects need to improve. Pupils have clear targets to help improve their skills in writing. For example, a pupil in Year 4 was able to tell me that her current writing target was 'to use "was" and "were" correctly in a sentence'. Consequently, standards in writing are rising.

The English leader has ensured that pupils now have frequent opportunities to read and develop their comprehension skills. New books have been purchased for the library and existing books have been 'banded' to ensure that pupils are choosing books at the correct level of challenge. Teachers now provide frequent opportunities for pupils to tackle new words and develop inference and deduction skills. For example, in Year 2, pupils were enjoying comparing the similarities and differences between characters in a poem. The teacher then skilfully challenged the class to predict how the poem might end, ensuring that pupils gave reasons to justify their predictions.

The governing body acted promptly to undertake an external review of governance. This helped to confirm governors' view that they would benefit from having fewer committee meetings and from receiving training, for example on analysing pupils' outcomes effectively. The external review also recommended that the role of the link governor be updated. All of these actions have been completed successfully.

The pupil premium funding is not allocated or monitored effectively. It is therefore unclear how disadvantaged pupils are benefiting from this funding and the impact it is having on their achievement. Leaders and the governing body should therefore take urgent action to ensure that the funding is used effectively. This is a different picture to that seen at the time of the previous inspection.

There is a strong safeguarding culture within the school. Staff have received appropriate training in areas such as the 'Prevent' duty, female genital mutilation and supporting families who have suffered from domestic violence. There is a robust system for adults to record welfare concerns regarding pupils and their families. Consequently, the designated safeguarding leader ensures that the support of outside agencies is requested promptly when it is needed. Relevant checks are made on adults before they are allowed to start working or volunteering at the school.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. The vast majority with whom I spoke told me their child was happy and safe and making good progress. One parent told me her daughter 'absolutely loves it here!'

External support

The support given by the local authority has been effective. The school improvement adviser has, for example, successfully helped leaders make accurate judgements about the quality of teaching and learning. The adviser has also trained the governing body in understanding pupils' assessment data and ensuring that they are fully prepared for upcoming meetings. Consequently, governors are becoming increasingly searching in their monitoring of the school, asking appropriate questions during meetings and visits to check on the progress of the school improvement plan.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Peter Stonier
Her Majesty's Inspector